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New Americans for a
New America

THREE GATES TO AMERICA

BISHOP EDWIN HOLT HUGHES



Published by The Board of Home Missions and
Church Extension of the Methodist Episcopal
Church, 1026 Arch Street, Philadelphia, Pa.

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"The work of Home Missions and Church Extension is essentially a work of patriotism. Every lover of his country should gladly contribute to aid the needy in the erection of churches and in the support of the men who on small salaries preach the gospel in these churches."—ROBERT FORBES.

Three Gateways to America

New Americans come to us through three gates; the gate of immigration, the gate of birth, and the gate of character. The problem with immigration is spiritual assimilation. The problem with youth is spiritual education. The problem with character is spiritual regeneration. If we are to have a new America, it must arrive from these three directions.

America Just Entering Upon Its Career

That adjective "new" has played a huge part in all our American life. Its use began in colonial days. The hope for the future as well as the reverence for the past was expressed by its recurrence even in geography. New England, New Hampshire, New York, New Brunswick, New Amsterdam, New Orleans, New Rochelle, —all these names, whether English or Dutch or French, were symbols of expectancy as well as reminders of fond experience in the lands beyond the sea. In truth, the adjective "new" has been used in a wholesale manner; and we speak of our country still as the "New World." More than four hundred years have passed since Christopher Columbus touched these shores with the cross of our faith. Yet our National hope is so large and bright that, in spite of well-nigh half a millenium of his-

tory and the passing of about twelve generations of human beings, we persist in calling America the "New World." The emblem of our Nation is not tottering age, nor even staid and completed mid-life; it is rather youth,—buoyant, eager, glad. The visitor to our land is not treated to the sight of many ruins, but he is regaled with the vision of many castles in the American air. We still look here for a "new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness." The mood of the New Testament is in our blood.

Making Americans Is a Holy and Serious Task

The ever-present danger is that we shall think of new Americans as creations rather than achievements, and of the new America as an inevitable happening rather than as a holy and serious task. The pillars of State are not flung into their places by the lazy fancy of men, nor are they pushed beneath the temple of State as structural accidents. They are shaped and cemented in the sweat and blood of men. It is nearly three hundred years since Plymouth Rock became historic, and nearly a century and a half since the Liberty Bell became musical. The dust of millions and of hundreds of millions is lying beneath the sod of valley and mountain. Still do we speak of the "new land," and "new Americans," and of the "New America." We toss these phrases upon a program as if the normal

American heart needed no explanation of their meaning. It may be said that Christianity as a religion and the United States as a nation have this in common: that both hear some adequate power saying, "Behold, I make all things new."

The Definite Work of the Methodist Episcopal Church

It is our duty as Christian men to see to it that America shall turn to Jesus Christ for all its newness. Those who come to us through the gates of immigration must be met in His spirit. Those who come to us through the gates of birth must be received as His immortal charges, to be kept as His own forever. Those who would seek the gates of regeneration must be persuaded out of the hostile country and the neutral ground until the touch of Christ's power shall make them new men and, therefore, best Americans. At whichever of the three points we meet our problem, the method and spirit of Jesus are our only hope. God stations us at all three of the gates through which the new Americans come in order that, by ushering them into His life, we may likewise usher in the New America.

The Command to Board of Home Missions and Church Extension

What, then, is the command that comes to us from the spirit of Jesus as to our attitude toward those who arrive through the

gates of immigration? This is not the occasion for debating the wisdom of our immigration laws. Among Christian men there can be no possible controversy on one point: If our laws give men and women and children either invitation or liberty to come to our shores, they must here be fashioned after our political life, and they must be met and conquered by that free gospel that is alone the safeguard of our Republic. If each year a million new faces turn eagerly to our ports, it will be national idiocy and religious apostasy for us to withhold that sympathy that is the very beginning of spiritual assimilation. Let it be said without sentimentality that the great assimilator is love. In the long run, that section of the Church of Christ that most loves the immigrant will most claim the immigrant. Physicians will tell us, in their medical vocabulary, that very often the immigrant is afflicted with "nostalgia." He longs for the vision of the native hills and valleys and of the dear faces of his family and friends until at last his heart breaks for very loneliness. The steerage of the ships and the files of Castle Garden are filled with the germs of homesickness. Christian men must furnish the antidote. Jesus would do just that. His heart would yearn toward those newcomers. He who said, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head," would enter into sympathy with those

homeless arrivals. God put the "stranger" into the Ten Commandments and allied the dispensation of law with the treatment of every newcomer. Jesus put the "stranger" into the tests of the judgment and allied Himself with every foreigner whose anxious eyes really look for the face of Christ in the American welcome. Those who know best will tell us that the stranger is peculiarly susceptible to Christian friendliness. Our Lord knew this when He identified Himself with him and said, "I was a Stranger, and ye took Me in." The Christian attitude toward this candidate for Americanism is not simply that he represents Caesar or Savonarola, Luther or Goethe, Huss or Copernicus, Shakespeare or Milton; it is rather that he represents Christ. Long ago four Greeks came and said, "Sirs, we would see Jesus." In their coming our Lord beheld the coming of His own Kingdom. Out of a vast hope He said that those fragments of the outside world were prophecies of His wide reign over all the world.

Success Attending Home Mission Work

Already our Lord has given us these tokens of optimism. Already many thousands of immigrants are walking the ways of loyal Americanism and likewise the ways of a free and spiritual religion. Some of them are in all our Churches. In a union

Thanksgiving service of our denomination in San Francisco one would have noted the Japanese here, the Chinese there, the Scandinavians on the left, the Swedes on the right, the Germans in the center, and a little group of Italians sitting, shy and modest, in the front seats. He would be dull, both in his American faith and in his Christian faith, who would not see the significance of such a scene as that. My brethren, every year God gives His Church in America a million opportunities in as many immigrants. William Nast was one of those opportunities in the not distant past. We seized that human chance for Christ, and to-day many thousands of voices, both German and English, bless the event, while a fine stream of Teuton blood helps to make both the New America and the new Methodism. God give grace to his Church that we may more and more make Castle Garden one of the entrances to His Kingdom and that we may turn the Panama Canal into a river of life along whose borders will grow the trees for the healing of the nation!

Work Among the Children

We must not, however, neglect that other road along which wee feet walk into our National and Church life. Far more than a million little people come annually out of the everywhere into the here. Around each of a thousand cradles men and women

stand daily saying, "What manner of child shall this be?" George McDonald makes this dialogue to occur with each blessed and breathing arrival:

"And how did you come to be just you?
God thought of me, and so I grew.

"And how did you come to us, you dear?
God thought of you, and so I am here."

It requires no great strain on faith to say that this is quite as true in the National and in the Church sense as it is in the family sense. Every child is God's thought for the future of the Church and the Nation. Those eager feet romp on to take our places. The boys that shouted on their way to school this very day will run the Men's Convention twenty-five years hence. The chairman of those coming sessions to-day gave the mystic signals on the gridiron. The speakers of that coming program to-day exercised their vocal powers in shouting teams onward to the goal. He is an infidel who does not believe that those boundless powers belong to Christ, and he is a new betrayer of our Lord who takes no earnest part in keeping their feet in the path everlasting. These are the new Americans that will fashion the new America,—these the new souls that will make the new Christian Republic.

Christ's Mood Toward the Children

Nor can there be any real doubt as to the attitude of Christ toward the subjects of this problem. To rich men Jesus showed a differing mood. To the adults who sought His teaching He gave widely differing commands. But to children He was ever the same,—gentle, hopeful, and utterly dogmatic in reference to their spiritual standing,—saying: "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones;" "Whosoever shall offend one of these little ones;" "The Kingdom of Heaven belongeth unto such." We will search the words of Jesus all in vain for any utterance that did not distinctly claim all childhood as His own. Beyond the earthly parenthood He saw the Heavenly Fatherhood. Above the family tree He saw the eternal reach of ancestry. The children's names were written in the Lamb's book of life ere they were penned in the family Bible of earth. Jesus on the streets of Jerusalem represents God, gathering the children in His arms and saying forever, "Suffer the little ones to come unto Me and forbid them not." They will come if they are merely suffered to come. They will come if they are not forbidden. The time may arrive when they will walk the byways and highways and when the Lord's word will be, "Compel them to come in." It is not so now. Children are the primary opportunity of the people of God. They are the hope of America and of the Church.

Children Included in the System of Redemption

It might not be amiss for us to imitate the splendid dogmatism of Jesus with reference to the spiritual standing of children. We forbear to do so. Whether our problem be that of keeping them within the Kingdom, or of gaining them for the Kingdom, their plastic lives will answer to our touch. Among all hopeful signs for our Church of the present time, this is the most hopeful: that there is a loving Children's Crusade in the plan of the Kingdom; not a crusade that sends wee marchers to die on the plains of Italy in a wild attempt to recover Jerusalem from the Saracens; not the hysterical leadership of Nicholas of Vendome and Stephen of Cologne; not a glaring track of small skeletons whitening beyond the passes of the Alps and southward; but rather a crusade which seeks to claim every young life as a recruit for that army that is led by the Son of God as He goes forth to war against strongholds mightier than a walled Jerusalem. If we knew the far and high issues and the sure tokens of progress we would hail the large increase in Sunday school scholars as the prophecy of new Americans, new Methodists, new soldiers for Christ. Here in a Men's Convention Jesus would still place the child in the midst. Directly we shall know that nothing more truly represents Jesus than a proper attitude toward the little people. When

that attitude claims us wholly, we shall put child labor to death and the two million pairs of small feet that even to-day stood in the mills and factories of our Nation will walk out to their God-appointed places of preparation in the schools and Churches of the Nations and to their God-appointed play amid the daisies of the field. The Christian conception of childhood will soon or late reach the hand of the modern Herod and stop forever the modern slaughter of the innocents. It will do more than this: it will translate the children from the dust of mills and factories, not only into the sunshine of natural childhood, but even into the Kingdom of God. We shall hear the march of that glad and alert procession of children as it moves through the beautiful gate of the temple. When we allow the Good Shepherd to gather the lambs in His bosom, He will be compelled to make fewer journeys out to the wild and bare mountains that He may recover the lost to the safety and peace of His blessed fold.

The Gate of Character and the Board of Home Missions

But there is another gate through which new Americans may be brought to the new America. Immigrants may become our anarchists and saloonists. Children may grow up to be grafters and blasphemers. Immigration is not regeneration. Assimilation is not sanctification. Educa-

tion is not a new birth. The inspector at Ellis Island cannot see the heart. The public school teacher may not officially use the penitent form or the mourner's bench. If we but knew it, the hope of America lies with the men who proclaim a redeeming God. A revival of religion is necessarily a revival of assuring Americanism. Crowded altars are the Republic's best hope.

The Nation Not Made Up of Hills and Valleys

For, after all, we need a frequent return to the commonplace statement that a Nation is not made up of hills and valleys, but rather of human souls. Every good man makes a better America. When the preacher sees his convert walking the ways of righteousness and service, he can say, "I have helped my country." Rocks and rills and woods and templed hills get their meaning from men. Mrs. Browning does not overstate it in her "Aurora Leigh":

"Government, if veritable and lawful
Is not given by the imposition of the foreign hand.

* * * * *

Genuine government is but the expression
of a people,
The loud sum of its silent units."

The unit of America is an individual heart. Every renewed heart lifts the moral average of the Nation and is a contribution

to the new America. It is the business of the Church, both as a matter of patriotism and of religion, to keep open the gates through which men and women walk the ways of genuine penitence to the peace and pardon and purity of God.

The Message of Methodism

This was the message of Methodism to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It must be our message to the twentieth century. It may be that at times and by some persons the doctrine of conversion has been held narrowly; and it is doubtless true that we have confused many good hearts by the preaching of a typical experience. But our main message remains intact: God Almighty by the Holy Ghost sent down from above and by the free grace revealed in Jesus Christ, does save men from their sins and does give them new hearts. That conception has found its way into literature, both polite and philosophic. William James celebrates it in his "Varieties of Religious Experience," and the Harvard professor leaves the prime contention of Methodism in possession of the field.

Methodism's Fundamental Doctrine

Harold Begbie celebrates the same spiritual fact in his two books that, recounting actual experiences, none the less read like heaven-inspired romances of the soul. We may well submit, that when the philosopher

and the novelist begin to exalt the doctrine of conversion, it is a poor time for a Methodist Episcopal preacher or layman to slur or modify or discount the first and foremost article of our creed. The whole modern movement in religion swings back to the position of our fathers and admits, however falteringly, the gospel of a regenerating God. In that gospel is revealed the one sure process of making new Americans, and from that gospel alone can come a new and exalted America.

New Americans Must Conquer Themselves

Years ago Sir Edwin Arnold visited America and spoke to the students of our oldest university. One memorable and even unforgettable sentence seized the memory of every hearer. He gave a succinct and epigrammatic description of the great wars of our past and of the greater contest of our future. "Gentlemen of Harvard," he said, "in 1776 and in 1812 you conquered your fathers. In the years from 1861 to 1865 you conquered your brothers. Will you permit an Englishman to say that your next victory must be over yourselves?" It is small wonder that the sentiment wins for itself frequent quotation. It approaches the heart of our present American problem. We need not ask for that control over ourselves that is represented merely by cool diplomacy that seeks advantage in commer-

cial or political contest. Rather should we ask for the control that is large enough to yield to God and wise enough to choose His way.

Christ America's Only Hope

We boast of the Anglo-Saxon blood. We forget that our ancestors were the wild men of the North until Jesus found them and made them the mightiest people on earth. If America goes back on Him, we will make choice of suicide. One who is from the Pacific Coast may be allowed to say that the only "yellow peril" is a white peril. If America rejects Jesus and if China and Japan accept Him, the yellow man will seize our crown. But if America shall keep Christ and more and more live in His spirit, and if China and Japan shall accept Christ and shall walk in His ways, they will simply become the Eastern and Western partners of the Prince of Peace.

America for Christ, Christ for America

By this program America may become the servant of God for the world of God. Claiming the immigrant for our free religion as well as for our free Republic, claiming the child for the Stars and Stripes only more because we claim him for the banner of Immanuel, and claiming every sinner for a cleaner Nation and an ampler gospel—we shall make our country great by the greatness of God Himself.

